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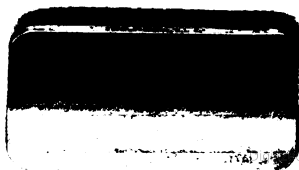
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*AUTHORDOXY*

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# AUTHORDOXY

BEING A DISCURSIVE EXAMINATION  
OF MR. G. K. CHESTERTON'S "ORTHODOXY"

*By*

ALAN HANDSACRE

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD  
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY. MCMXXI

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*TO MY WIFE*

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## PREFACE

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**T**HIS book is no more a serious exposition of Rationalism than Mr. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* is a serious exposition of Christianity. What he has attempted to do in that book is, he tells us, "in a vague and personal way . . . to state the philosophy in which I have come to believe." What I have attempted to do in this book—which was written during the war, and more because I felt inclined to write it than because I wanted to publish it—is to state by way of "a vague and personal" commentary on Mr. Chesterton's volume why it has not converted me to his philosophy.

Mr. Chesterton is all for the common people against the specialist. Well, I am one of the common people, and I have jotted down some of the things that have occurred to me in the course of reading his book.

A. H.



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## CHAPTER I—*On the New Apologist*

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CHRISTIAN apologetics, strictly so called, appear to have gone out of fashion. It is the characteristic of new fashions that they are generally old fashions, and I am not without fear that we may presently witness a revival of tedious theological dialectics. But for the moment the clergy have handed over the defence of their professional interest to the journalists. It is a shrewd move to have made, for it is the first business of a journalist to be interesting, and, if the new apologist is less erudite than his predecessor, he is a great deal more readable.

Further, the new apologist does battle in the open. This is a very great advantage. The pulpit is a coward's castle, in which a man is secure from refutation in the face of his hearers. Even when the parson ventures into print, it does not advantage us much. For his defence of religion will be read by persons who have

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never doubted it ; and the criticisms of his thesis will mostly be read by persons who have already rejected it. But every one—except Mr. Balfour—reads the newspapers, and, when religion is defended in their columns, and by a layman, we feel free to enter with becoming zest into the conflict.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton is indubitably the chief of the journalistic apologists for Christianity. The book which is examined in these pages may be regarded as a collected presentation of the points that its author has dealt with in innumerable articles in the Press. Before dealing with that book in some detail, it may be well to try to form some estimate of Mr. Chesterton's general method. I shall state it in my own way, but I believe that it will be admitted to be stated fairly.

The key-note of Mr. Chesterton's apologetic is Catholicism, but the key-note of his position is that he is not a Catholic in the only intelligible sense of that word. He would, I think, agree with Emerson that " the lesson of life is, practically to generalize, to believe what the years and the centuries say against the hours ;

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## *On the New Apologist*

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to resist the usurpation of particulars ; to penetrate to their catholic sense." We shall see with what consistency Mr. Chesterton acts upon this soothing principle in his capacity as an apologist for Christianity.

A Christian by profession, and a controversialist by nature as well as by habit, Mr. Chesterton could not have kept out of the fight for the faith. Seeing his religion in a rather bad way, not much impressed by the case being put up for it by other people, recognizing that it is possible to give people too much of a bad thing, he seems to have assured himself that this is no private fight, and, having done so, entered boisterously into the thick of it.

But his methods of fighting are new, at all events to the theological arena. "Come on, me fine fellows," he seems to say, "let us walk as far as the *Bull and Bush*, drink a pint of ale, and look into these matters." It cannot be disputed that this is a more attractive invitation than the announcement that the vicar will preach on a forthcoming Sunday on the fallacies of modern unbelief !

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If we accompany Mr. Chesterton, we shall have a very good time. But, unless we are very dense, we shall not have walked far with him before we discover what he is at. It is something very like the confidence trick. He knows all about us before he issues his invitation. He does not know much about our definite opinions, but he has taken care to ascertain our pet aversions, and little odds and ends of information about us that will enable him to appear quite at home with our point of view. He discovers, for example, that I have a notion that Christianity is repressive, that it lacks humanism, that it prefers to prepare for the joys of what seems to me a very disagreeable place called heaven rather than to delight in the solid happiness of human life. Knowing this, he gains my confidence at once by his exuberant cheerfulness and hospitality. Then his scheme is to turn the tables on me. He will try to convince me that the real kill-joy is the unbeliever ; that the deadly, serious people who never do silly things are the readers of the *Freethinker* ; and that the Christian is the jolliest chap in the world.

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## *On the New Apologist*

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Now there is a fatal delusion at the back of this method of apologetics. It supposes that a man cannot believe in facts without believing in fads. It takes it for granted that to be critical is to be cranky, and that to be a materialist is to be miserable. It is only the person who does not detect these somewhat obtrusive assumptions that will be misled by Mr. Chesterton's genial enthusiasm for the Christian faith. The unbelievers, according to him, are

“ . . . them that do not have the faith,  
And will not have the fun.”

They are, literally, of the company to which Mr. Chesterton, for all his rollicking, professes to belong—“miserable sinners.” Says he :

“ If I had been a Heathen,  
I'd have crowned Nœra's curls,  
And filled my life with love affairs,  
My house with dancing girls ;  
But Higgins is a Heathen,  
And to lecture rooms is forced,  
Where his aunts, who are not married,  
Demand to be divorced.”



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Personally I have never met a Rationalist like this Higgins—I know many Christians who might be mistaken for him—but I have no doubt that he exists. There are extraordinary Rationalists like Higgins, just as there are extraordinary Christians like Chesterton. No one but Mr. Chesterton himself, however, would perpetrate the assertion that there are some four hundred millions of people in this world of whom he is a typical specimen.

It is clear that Mr. Chesterton cannot resist the “usurpation of particulars.” He is a Christian, he likes beer; therefore, it is Christian to like beer. Higgins is an Agnostic, he has maiden aunts of advanced opinions; therefore, it is Agnosticism to have maiden aunts of advanced opinions! Of course there is nothing particularly Christian in being fond of beer. I am very fond of it myself. And there is nothing essentially rationalistic in being dragged to lectures by one’s aunts. But it is part of Mr. Chesterton’s plan of campaign to make a rule of the exceptions. I might state the case the other way round:

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If I had been a Christian,  
And never had a doubt,  
I'd have longed to get to heaven  
And find its glory out ;  
But Higgins is a Christian,  
And whenever he is ill,  
He rushes to the doctor—  
To be kept in Notting Hill.

This is quite as worthless as an attack on Christianity as is Mr. Chesterton's rhyme as an attack on Rationalism. They both dodge the real issue, but, if I may be allowed to say so, I think Mr. Chesterton's rhyme the more unreasonable of the two. It is not so absurd to think that Christians ought not to fear death as to think that non-Christians are poor, miserable creatures tied to the apron-strings of their aunts. The basis of Mr. Chesterton's apologetic is, however, more than an assumption : it is a slander.

The old-fashioned apologist — like Dr. Torrey—drew a lurid picture of the infidel screaming for mercy on his death-bed, and suggested that, if you had a Rationalist in the house, you would be well advised to lock up your silver. The unbeliever was represented

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by him as of necessity a depraved character. Now Mr. Chesterton serves up this grotesque libel in a less repulsive fashion. The verse which I have quoted above from his "Song of the Strange Ascetic," if it means anything, means this: that unbelief involves loss of moral balance, looseness in the sexual relation, and the selfish pursuit of personal pleasure. If these things do characterize the Rationalist, they are evidences of the evils of unbelief. If they do not characterize them, their absence is also evidence of the evil of unbelief! This is typically Chestertonian and totally irrational. If Mr. Chesterton will make out a list of the people who during the last century or so have been working to uplift and brighten the lives of the people of England, he will find that the unbelievers are in a majority, and he will find that the attitude of the believers to their efforts might be expressed by a parody of his lines that I have quoted above:

" . . . them that will not have the faith,  
Shall never have the fun."

Also he will discover by a reference to criminal

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statistics that most of the people in prisons are believers. The superior altruism and morality of the Christian is a delusion. And, if it be answered that the Christian who is a criminal is not a Christian, it may suffice to reply that the Rationalist who is a roué is not a Rationalist.

To sum up this introductory chapter, Mr. Chesterton is a logician who endeavours to obscure the falsity of his premises by the extreme logicity of his arguments in their support. He uses all his reasoning faculties to prevent reasoning. "The road to hell is paved with good intentions," says the proverb, but, as a modern politician has remarked, the beauty of the pavement does not improve the destination. It is not difficult to defend orthodoxy, provided that you are not concerned about the consistency of the various parts of your defence with each other. But the brilliance of your inconsistency does not make it consistent.

Mr. Chesterton, who has said most things, has said that to level against him the accusation of brilliance is the last refuge of his critics "in the final ecstasy of their anger." Well, I am

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not angry, and I say that, if the arguments of Mr. Chesterton were put as crudely as they are, in fact, put brilliantly, they would be laughed out of court. As it is they are not infrequently laughed into court.

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## CHAPTER II—*In Defence of Something Else*

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THE first chapter of *Orthodoxy* is entitled "In Defence of Everything Else." It suggests that the author had an uneasy notion that the reader might rise from a perusal of his book with the impression that it stands in more need of a defence than the theory it expounds—if, indeed, it expounds any theory at all. As a matter of fact, the only person who would require a defence from Mr. Chesterton for any book of his is the person who would not read Mr. Chesterton's defence of it if he wrote it. For most of us it does not in the least matter what Mr. Chesterton means, for we are entertained beyond measure by what he says.

Mr. Chesterton begins at the beginning. He also finishes at the beginning, as we shall presently observe. He begins by explaining how *Orthodoxy* came to be written. It seems that Mr. G. S. Street, in reviewing another book of Mr. Chesterton's, said: "I will begin

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to worry about my philosophy when Mr. Chesterton has given us his." By that remark Mr. Street "inspired and created this book."

In the next chapter we are given another account of the origin of the volume before us. Its author was taking a walk with a prosperous publisher, and that gentleman said of somebody: "That man will get on; he believes in himself." The author thereupon had an argument with the publisher, arising from this remark—it will be examined in the next chapter—and the publisher wound up by asking: "Well, if a man is not to believe in himself, in what is he to believe?" To which Mr. Chesterton replied, "I will go home and write a book in answer to that question." And, he tells us, "This is the book that I have written in answer to it."

The author of a book ought to know by whom or by what it was inspired. Mr. Chesterton is the author of *Orthodoxy*, and he has two opinions on the matter of its inspiration. There is a certain consistency in this, for he has two, or more, opinions on most things. We are left in a little doubt, however,

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## *In Defence of Something Else*

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as to whether this book was written to explain Mr. Chesterton's philosophy or to prove that men should not believe in themselves. Unless as I think there are some grounds for believing, Mr. Chesterton's philosophy *is* that men should not believe in themselves.

The first achievement of the creed or philosophy called "Orthodoxy" is, our author tells us, that it enables him "to be at home in the world and yet astonished at it . . . to combine an idea of wonder and an idea of welcome . . . to be happy in this wonderland without once being merely comfortable."

It is very true that it is desirable to regard life as an adventure, and that it is not desirable to get into a rut. But that is precisely what Mr. Chesterton has done. Only he appears to be under the impression that to wriggle about fantastically in a rut is the same thing as to get out of a rut. He wants to make out that the agnostic is a stick-in-the-mud, and he does it by proving as conclusively as he proves anything that he is a stick-in-the-mud himself. For, while most people who discovered themselves to be stuck in the mud



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would regard it as a very pleasant thing to get clear of it, Mr. Chesterton seems to think it a great achievement to have thought about getting out of it, and a greater to have remained more firmly fixed in it than ever. He says: "What can be more glorious than to brace oneself up to discover New South Wales and then to realize, with a gush of happy tears, that it was really old South Wales."

This seems to mean that the delight of life consists more in the things we imagine than in the things we experience: that anticipation is better than realization, that the best way to enjoy something you want is not to get it. But, while it is true that many things fail to come up to our expectations of them, I am free to confess I have never found any delight in that circumstance. If I had prepared myself with some care for the beatific vision of the New Jerusalem, I do not think I should be moved to "a gush of happy tears" to find it was Old Jewry. Serious as the consequences may be for Mr. Chesterton's dialectic, it must be admitted that it is impossible for a man to be abroad and at home at the same time. It

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## *In Defence of Something Else*

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is impossible to perceive any object in a man bracing himself up to discover Sydney who has no intention of putting a foot outside Swansea. Nor is it at all clear why any man should be moved to tears by the discovery that if he does not shift his position he will remain standing where he is.

• It is the main fallacy, as it is the first contention, of Mr. Chesterton's view that a man may have his cake and eat it too : that he may enjoy the pleasures of feasting and the satisfaction of fasting at one and the same moment. The thing cannot be done, and that is all there is to be said about it.

The combination of astonishment at the world and a sense of being at home in it is a strictly rational combination. The more we are at home in the world, and the more we know of its territories and of its people, the more astonished we become at it. But there are some people with whom one cannot feel "at home." And there are some places in which one cannot feel "at home." For example, I doubt if Mr. Chesterton would feel at home in the Rhondda Valley. If he were

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to go and live there for a month, instead of sustaining a "gush of happy tears" because it is really old South Wales, he would shed bitter tears of indignation because it is not New South Wales. It is possible to find enough of glad and sad surprise, of adventure, of novelty, of mental and moral stimulus in the things of every day, if only we will avoid the notion that things are exciting in proportion as they are remote or incomprehensible. It is the Christian who says :

"I'm but a stranger here,  
Heaven is my home,"

and misses all the fun of his temporary lodgings in unprofitable speculation and dreaming as to the character of the mansion that he is going to move into by and by.

It is the Rationalist who says that the earth is the only home that he knows of for mankind, and proceeds to try to make it as comfortable and as inspiring a dwelling-place as possible for himself and for those who are to follow him.

The Christian resigns himself to this life because of his anticipation of another. He has, he thinks, "a mansion in the sky," and

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that will compensate him for a third-floor back in the Mile End Road. The Rationalist does not resign himself to this life because he does not see any grounds for anticipating another. He is discontented with the Mile End Road just because he does not believe himself to be heir to any mansion—in the sky or anywhere else. And discontent is the beginning of adventure, as it is also the secret of being “at home.” It is the man who is possessed of a comfortable home who spends his evenings at the Club. And, generally speaking, the more uncomfortable a man’s home is the more time he spends in it. Thus does he learn that a home is not a thing that depends on the size of rooms and the quality of furniture for its existence, but on that affection the lack of which makes the mansion tawdry for all its elegance, and the garret glorious for all its poverty. Mr. Chesterton manages to endure home by dreaming of New South Wales, and by bracing himself up to discover a Brighton that doesn’t exist, with the Pavilion as a barbaric temple; but the happy man who does not mistake an

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illusion for an ideal is content to have discovered home. For him it is enough that centuries of struggle have gone to give him the ideal of home which he may possess in his imagination, and the, probably, second-rate little shanty that he may possess in fact. It is his life's adventure to reach the ideal, and he is nerved for that adventure by the real. While Mr. Chesterton is never at home except when he is abroad, the Rationalist is never abroad except when he is at home.

In a typical gibe at modern thought, Mr. Chesterton says : " I did, like all other solemn little boys, try to be in advance of my age. Like them I tried to be some ten minutes in advance of truth. And I found that I was eighteen hundred years behind it." I do not understand what is meant by being ten minutes in advance of truth. These solemn little boys who are supposed to entertain that absurd ambition may have been the sole companions of Mr. Chesterton's youth—in which case I can comprehend his queer notions about lunatics—but most of us have been more fortunate. We discovered that what we re-

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garded as truth was about eighteen hundred years behind it, and we are finding no end of sport in trying to make up for lost time. Mr. Chesterton seems to find great glee in the fact that he does not recognize that any time has been lost.

There is only one way that I know of meeting the argument that romance is reaction, which is the argument of the book in hand. It is to prove that progress is a romance, and that it is precisely what is proved by the whole life of the world as we see it. Ideals begin in realities. Progress is the name given to the process of making ideals materialistic realities. When a young man falls in love, he rises in character and capacity. What was a vague dream becomes an object of personal and enobling desire. The most ordinary and unimaginative creatures will do the most heroic things under the inspiration of the most tender and terrible of all human emotions. And if you were to ask one of them what moved him from being a hand in a pickle factory to become a poet, or a philosopher, or a politician, or even a preacher, he will not tell you it was

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God. He will tell you it was a girl. And he will tell you the truth. Men have done great things for what they believed to be the honour and glory of God from purely human motives. But men have never done anything for the honour and glory of mankind from purely supernatural motives. For the ideal—which men call God—has its birth in the reality called humanity.

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### CHAPTER III—*On the Road to Hanwell*

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**I**T happened, by one of those coincidences that occur in fiction and in the serious works of Mr. Chesterton, that as the prosperous publisher asked what a man is to believe in, if he cannot believe in himself, Mr. Chesterton looked up and caught sight of an omnibus going to—Hanwell! “The men who really believe in themselves,” he said, “are all in lunatic asylums.” And so it comes to pass that the second chapter of this book in defence of orthodoxy is entitled “The Maniac.”

The argument of this chapter is this: “Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason.” Sanity is the badge of orthodoxy. Insanity is the mark of the heterodox.

There is a sense in which heterodoxy is like insanity: it is an abnormal condition of mind. But it is just the fallacy of such picturesque analogies as Mr. Chesterton loves to draw that



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they are utterly superficial. Take this case. Heterodoxy is abnormal, and insanity is abnormal. But a giant is abnormal, and so is a freak. Indeed, in the side-shows a giant is sometimes classed with the freaks. But Mr. Chesterton must not tell me that to have an abnormally developed physique is the same thing as to have two heads, or a pig's face, or a body minus arms and legs. One is an abnormal development along healthy lines; the other is a deformity, a repellent and hideous monstrosity. The difference between my friend O'Riordan—the giant of the Irish Guards—and the Pig-faced Man is the difference between heterodoxy and insanity.

In order to make out his case that the men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums, Mr. Chesterton proceeds to deal with certain cases of delusional insanity by way of illustration. Other forms of mental aberration lend themselves less effectively to the needs of the argument.

When it is stated in plain terms that reason is the thing that breeds insanity, the average

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man rubs his eyes and wonders if he has seen correctly the words before him. He has heard of "religious mania," but he has never heard before of the madness of being too sane. Moreover, not being quite so easily convinced as Mr. Chesterton would like to think he is, the average man will detect the fallacy of this assertion with very little effort. To say that it is reason that breeds insanity is the same as to say that it is the heart that breeds heart disease and that "exactly what does cause blindness is the sight." It is clear that a man cannot lose his reason who has no reason, just as it is clear that a man cannot suffer from hæmorrhage of the nose who has no nose.

The distinction between reason and imagination—as if imagination were unreasoning—is, in this connection, equally wide of the mark. Mr. Chesterton says that poets do not go mad but mathematicians do. The fact is that the rational conduct of mental processes is the safeguard of sanity. The poet who goes mad is the poet who treats poetry as mathematics. The mathematician who goes mad is the

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mathematician who treats mathematics as poetry. The religious maniac is a person who tries to treat religion as a matter of reasoning. And the only atheist I ever heard of as a madman was an atheist who attempted to treat atheism as a religion.

Let us look at this proposition that "the men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums" again.

On the face of it, it looks to me as if a man who believes he is a poached egg does not believe in himself. If he did, he would request somebody to eat him before he got cold. Going beneath the surface, it is as plain as anything can be that the one creed that the lunatic does *not* hold is belief in himself.

We may take the cases of delusional insanity to which Mr. Chesterton refers. There is the man who thinks he is the rightful King of England. It would probably be found, if we could refer to the medical history sheet of this unfortunate gentleman, that he began as a member of the Thames Valley Legitimist Club. He thought the reigning monarch

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destitute of title ; he gave himself to the cult of the doctrine of hereditary right in monarchy ; he paid no attention to the great movements of citizenship ; and, in course of time, he fell under the delusion of his own kingship. From first to last the one person in whom he had no confidence was himself.

The Legitimists who believe in themselves as well as in the *de jure* monarch of England are not mad. It is precisely the Legitimist who does not believe in himself who believes he is the King of England. Then there is the case of the man who thinks he is Jesus Christ. Here we may take a practical example. Some years ago the Rev. M. Smyth Pigott announced that he was Jesus Christ. If reliance can be placed on the testimony of men who knew him before the days of his delusion, this man is a typical case of delusional insanity, and a plain contradiction of Mr. Chesterton's theory.

He began, this religious maniac, as many others have begun, with a blameless life, and a passionate devotion to Jesus Christ. I have

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met men who knew him at Cambridge, who knew him in the days of his Anglican ministry, and I quote the words of one of them as expressive of the opinion of them all: "Smyth Pigott," said an old, well balanced, and fervently pious rector of a Suffolk parish to me, "was the most intensely spiritually minded man I ever knew." But he had one theme, the theme of all his preaching, all his devotion, all his meditation—the early and personal Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And so, by a process which can be verified in any work on delusional insanity, the concentration of his mind on one theme, to the exclusion of others that would have given it balance, ended in the assertion of his own Messiahship. It was not belief in himself, but belief in Jesus Christ that drove him mad.

The third case is that of a man who thinks all men are conspiring against him. Mr. Chesterton gives a graphic description of the sinister interpretation this man puts on the most simple acts. The whole world is full of snares set specially for him. He is, indeed, in

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the frame of mind of the Christian poet, Montgomery, when he wrote :

“ What is this world ? A 'wilderling maze,  
Where sin hath tracked ten thousand ways,  
Her victims to ensnare :  
All broad and leading and aslope,  
All tempting with perfidious hope,  
All ending in despair.”

That is the sort of stuff of which insanity is made. And the man who believes in it is the last man in this world who can be said to believe in himself. He believed in the individual who is the centre of the conspiracy of men and demons. But it is *not* himself that is the centre of any such conspiracy. The origin of this very common form of delusional insanity is generally that the victim has committed, or thinks he has committed, some sin of awful consequence, and, giving up his mind to the thought of that offence, he comes in process of time to believe that he has committed all the crimes in the calendar. Or, he has been tricked and cruelly wronged once ; he gives his mind only to the wrong he has suffered, and comes to believe that the whole

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race of men exists to do him injury. Never for an instant does it occur to him that he is only Himself.

The madman of experience "is commonly a reasoner, frequently a successful reasoner," says Mr. Chesterton. Now the one thing a madman does not do is to reason. Given his premises—say that the world has nothing else to do but plot against him—he can argue in their support. But the world *has* a great deal too much to do to bother about the poor man at all. His premises are insane. What follows is not reason. It is delusion. If I wanted to use words as Mr. Chesterton uses them, I might say that it is imagination. Really it is no more imagination than it is reason.

Mr. Chesterton might some day write that book about Brighton as a strange port on an island in the South Seas, and its Pavilion as a barbaric temple. If he did, it would be a work of imagination. But if it ever befell him to think that Brighton really is a barbaric place, and the Pavilion a heathen temple, that would *not* be imagination ; it would be mad-

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## *On the Road to Hanwell*

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ness. And Mr. Chesterton will never go mad because he is not in the least danger of leaving off reasoning to avoid the madhouse.

The insanity of reasoning is, it seems, that it leaves nothing for wonder and for awe. "Mr. McCabe," says Mr. Chesterton, "understands everything, and everything does not seem worth understanding." This is typically inaccurate. Mr. McCabe—or any other sincere Rationalist—will tell Mr. Chesterton that the first result of trying to understand the laws which govern the progress of the world is a consciousness of the vast tracts that remain uncharted and unknown. He will tell him that he finds the world full of wonder, that there is spread out before him more food for his imagination than he ever found in theology. He does not shut his eyes and dream of wonders that he cannot see. He opens his eyes and sees wonders of which he never dreamed. In short, it is not true that Rationalism cramps the imagination and drives men mad. It fires the imagination into rational activity and keeps men sane.



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Mr. Chesterton says: "It is the charge against the main deductions of the materialist that, right or wrong, they gradually destroy his humanity." If by a materialist here is meant a person without religious belief—the opposite of a supernaturalist—there could not be a more preposterous charge. The progress of more than a century refutes it. Did materialism involve the loss of his humanity in Holyoake? Has it distinguished the political and public career of Lord Morley that he lacks humanity? Is it not known to every man who has tried to do work for the benefit of his fellows that the moment he gets inside any humanitarian movement he discovers that its leading spirits are men and women animated by purely human motives, and working along secular lines, and that the religious people as a whole hold aloof?

Mr. Chesterton concludes this chapter with the assertion that "the one created thing which we cannot look at is the one thing in the light of which we look at everything." But it is not true that we cannot look at the sun.

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## *On the Road to Hanwell*

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What is true is that, if we would look at the sun, we must shield the naked vision with smoked glasses. Mr. Chesterton hates the smoked glasses. He would prefer not to look, or—to take his chance of being blinded. And that is the distinction between the materialist and the mystic.

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## CHAPTER IV—*The Murder of Thought*

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THE process that Mr. Chesterton describes in the third chapter of his defence of orthodoxy he calls "The Suicide of Thought." Here is the key-note to this part of his argument: "A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed."

Now, to begin with, I am not aware of any materialist who says that a man should be doubtful about the truth. If anyone were to tell Mr. McCabe that Mr. G. K. Chesterton is a dwarf, Mr. McCabe would not say that he was under a different impression, but that, of course, he might be wrong. To talk about being "undoubting about the truth" is to beg the question at issue. That question is—what is truth?

No materialist doubts the truth. But what materialists do doubt is that Mr. Chesterton and his friends have got hold of it all. After all, truth is not like a marble. You can't take

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## *The Murder of Thought*

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it up and put it in your pocket. Even the Catholic Church itself has had to devote great study to the science of casuistry ; and, if Mr. Chesterton had read moral theology, he would know that it is often a mighty tricky business to determine whether a statement is true or false. So often it is neither, or both. The only standard of truth is knowledge. Also knowledge is the only test of falsehood. If I said that Nelson's column is in Woburn Square, I should lie, because I know that it is in Trafalgar Square. But if I hazarded a guess at its height, knowing nothing about its dimensions, whatever, no man could call me a liar if I were wrong, as I probably should be. If I go into an inn with Mr. Chesterton—which is one of the things I hope to do before I die—and I say that bitter beer is better than whisky, Mr. Chesterton would be the last man alive to call me a liar because he held whisky better than bitter beer. Then, if we got to argument—and we certainly should—and Mr. Chesterton said that he believed hell to be as real as Holborn Circus, I should say that I know Holborn Circus as a place where one

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stands a good chance of being run over by a vehicle ; but that I do not know hell, which is, I gather, a place where one has no chance whatever of getting a drink. I should not say that Mr. Chesterton was a liar because he said that hell was real. And he would not "call me another" because I said I knew nothing about the place. There can be no question of abstract truth or falsehood when the matter under discussion is a doubtful matter. And Mr. Chesterton, if he were offered the wealth of the world in return, could no more produce the Rationalist of whom he writes, who "doubts if he can ever learn," than I can produce evidence that there is no hell. All I can say is that there is evidence of the existence of all the places known to exist. Also I am free to say that I will believe in the possibility of the existence of other places if and when I am given reasonable grounds for that belief. But I decline to believe in hell simply because Mr. Chesterton and millions of other people believe in it.

Mr. Chesterton's quarrel is much more with the man who doubts than with the man who dis-

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## *The Murder of Thought*

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believes. I think he would have more sympathy with the iconoclastic freethinker who is alleged—I believe on very questionable authority—to have invited the Almighty to strike him dead within five minutes and awaited the result watch in hand, than with the sincere man who, having been born and brought up a Christian, finds it impossible to believe in the dogmas of the Church.

The thing that Mr. Chesterton cannot stand is the open mind. He doesn't appear to care a fig whether he is the judge on the bench or the prisoner at the bar, so long as he is not asked to serve on the jury. "At any street corner," he says, "we may meet a man who utters the frantic and blasphemous statement that he may be wrong." And yet, if this book of his has any serious controversial purpose, the author must have written it to appeal to that very class of men—the men who admit that they may be wrong.

You have only to turn this hatred of the open mind the other way round, and look at it in its positive aspect, and you will see what it involves. It involves that every man shall say

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he *knows* he is right. And there is an end of the controversial exercise that is dear to Mr. Chesterton.

The modesty of modern thought upsets Mr. Chesterton quite as much as its pride. But he takes care to confine himself pretty much to what he thinks are the results of this modesty, and not to bother very much about its *raison d'être*. He is like a man whose child returned one day from school with scarlet fever which the fond parent attributed to bad drains. He set to work at once to have the drains, which were quite in order, attended to, and, when he had the foundations of his house out of course, discovered that there was an epidemic at the school.

How much time and trouble and inconvenience to himself and other people would he have saved if he had inquired first as to the probable cause of his child's illness.

It is Mr. Chesterton's habit to go to work on equally hasty assumptions. And one is tempted to wonder whether he is afraid that, if he made more careful inquiry, he would change his mind.

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## *The Murder of Thought*

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“In so far as religion has gone, reason is going,” says Mr. Chesterton. He proceeds to support this assertion by taking a rapid run “through the chief modern fashions of thought.” We will run over the same ground.

The error of materialism, we are told, is that it is mechanical. And, “if the mind is mechanical, thought cannot be very exciting.” Why? There is in a book to which Mr. Chesterton attaches some authority a passage which runs something like this: “While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, summer and winter, snow and heat, shall not cease.” This looks very like the mechanism of the seasons. And if the seasons are mechanical, summer cannot be very beautiful! That seems to be the end of Mr. Chesterton’s argument. But who save the apologist with some special ends of his own to look after will confuse such mechanism with monotony?

Next we have the “attack on thought urged by Mr. H. G. Wells when he insists that every separate thing is ‘unique,’ and there are no categories at all.”

I do not pretend to know exactly where this



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doctrine of Mr. Wells is expounded. But the contribution it brings to modern thought is that it enables us to realize that categories are working instruments and not things of value in themselves. It enables us to recognize, for example, that, although Mr. Chesterton is in the category called Christians, and holds the faith common to them all, they by no means all hold the faith peculiar to himself. The most characteristic thing about any category is the way it fails to include all it was intended to include. For want of more room a lot gets stuffed into it that it is not strictly speaking entitled to hold, and this lot juts out. Mr. Wells points out to us the people and the things that jut out, and it is really very difficult to see how this is an attack on thought. A man is a man all the world over. Yet there are no two men alike.

Mr. Chesterton's next anathema is against "the false theory of progress which maintains that we alter the test, instead of trying to pass the test." As to this, it is best to take an actual example. Belief in God used to be the test of a man's veracity in the courts. Now,

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## *The Murder of Thought*

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as he pleases, he can affirm, instead of swearing "by Almighty God." We have altered the test just because we have passed it.

There is a good deal more in this chapter which I, being an unlearned person, shall not follow with a detailed reply. Bernard Shaw and Nietzsche and Renan and Tolstoy, and all the things they have done to the men of our time—all this is set out in the pages that wind up this part of the book. And the moral of it all is, according to our author, that "in so far as religion has gone, reason is going." And the proof? That there is more reasoning in the world to-day than ever before. It is like Mr. Chesterton to set out to convince us that reason is going—and to do it by proving that reason has come.

For there is in all these efforts of the human mind to comprehend the riddle of the universe some element of truth. That element is the answer to all this pother about reason driving men mad. Better the madness of Tolstoy than the sanity of Torquemada. Better the sane insanity of a Robert Owen than the insane sanity of the gospel which, acting on the

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principles Mr. Chesterton admires, sought to block his path as it has attempted to block the path of every man who has thought more of the salvation of the poor crushed bodies of humanity than of the "salvation" of his own soul.

It is too late in the day to frighten us with the bugbear of Reason. We are entering upon the age of Reason, and, although we have not yet lived very long under the new dispensation, we invite a comparison of the Europe of to-day with the Europe of the ages of faith, and we have no fear of the result.

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## CHAPTER V—*On Castles in the Air*

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**T**HERE is a whimsical charm about the next chapter of *Orthodoxy*, which is entitled "The Ethics of Elfland."

The argument of the chapter, if, indeed, there is any argument in it, seems to be this: Mr. Chesterton is not Mr. Chesterton. Mr. Chesterton is Peter Pan. He is the boy that has never grown up, and his main hope is that he never will.

I always thought of Peter Pan with unmixed delight until I read Mr. Chesterton's all too graphic description of the sort of man a man who has never left off being a boy really is. Now it occurs to me that the main joy of being a boy is that one does not remain a boy for ever. It is a sad thing to assert, but I fear it is the truth that Mr. Chesterton is in violent antagonism to St. Paul. "When I became a man, I put away childish things," said St. Paul. "All the worse for you, poor man," Mr. Chesterton replies.

Mr. Chesterton says: "I have not lost my

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ideals in the least." The wild hopes of childish imagination still fill his soul. Ah! but what about the sense of their reality. The ideals of the child are not ideals. They are realities. And, alas, the realities of manhood are often very remote from ideals.

I remember reading a not very brilliant poem written, I should think, by a young man in the early days of his disillusionment. It describes a visit to the country, and a meeting with a village girl he had loved as a boy :

" She still is there—again I saw  
Her standing at the cottage door,  
And could but hang my head and think  
That I am worthy her no more."

He proceeds to contrast the simple purity of the life she has lived in the village

" secure . . .  
From the dread Maul of urban vice ; "

with the manhood that has lost its buoyancy with its boyhood, and he concludes :

" This world has made me what I am,  
Its taint upon me must abide :  
I wish I were a child again  
Whene'er I see the countryside."

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## *On Castles in the Air*

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This is not, as I have said, at all brilliantly expressed, but it describes a very common mental experience. For good or evil—for evil Mr. Chesterton rather surprisingly seems to think—we grow up. It is a fine thing if we can carry over the ideals of childhood, the dreams of youth, into the more placid years of maturity. But those ideals and dreams are not maturity, which is what Mr. Chesterton seems to take them for.

There comes a time when we find out Santa Claus. He was a delightful old gentleman who came down the chimney on Christmas Eve to fill our stockings with presents. We loved him because he gave us things. We did not love him apart from his gifts, for apart from his gifts we knew nothing about him. And then, one Christmas Eve, we found out that the name of Santa Claus is Father and Mother. Mr. Chesterton thinks this discovery a calamity. To find out things is to lose them if he is right. It seems to me that we never really find Santa Claus until we find him out. Then we know that gifts do not come inscrutably out of heaven in a bag on the back of an old man of

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vague identity, but that they come from shops, and have to be paid for with money that has to be worked for, and that might have been spent on the people who worked for it. We learn that benevolence is not a shadowy god-father who comes down the chimney, but a substantial father who comes up the stairs. We never felt any real gratitude to Santa Claus, because it seemed there was nothing to prevent him getting as many toys and sweet-meats as he wanted for all the boys and girls in the world. But we are grateful to Father, because we heard him telling that "things will be pretty bad this Christmas, but, whatever else goes, the kiddies must have a good time."

We thought that the gifts of Christmas were miraculous. We discover them to be paternal. We thought our benefactor, having left his gifts, departed into space, or into heaven, until next Christmas. We find he went no farther than the kitchen, where he sat smoking his pipe, and, with Mother's hand in his, discussing how much would have to be knocked of the little sums they spent upon

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## *On Castles in the Air*

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themselves because the kiddies had to be given a good time.

I am sure if ever I had met Santa Claus on Christmas morning I should have asked for something more or something different from his inexhaustible stock. But I know that, when I met my father on the morning after I discovered his name was Santa Claus, there was more in the kiss I gave him than in any I had given him before.

Mr. Chesterton says : “ When the business man rebukes the idealism of his office-boy, it is commonly in some such speech as this : ‘ Ah, yes, when one is young, one has these ideals in the abstract and these castles in the air ; but in middle age they all break up like clouds, and one comes down to a belief in practical politics, to using the machinery one has and getting on with the world as it is.’ ”

It may be there are business men who talk thus to their office-boys. I never met one of them. It is certainly true that some such statements as these are often made when experience meets impatience. But they do not of necessity bear the somewhat sinister



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significance that Mr. Chesterton bestows upon them.

To come down to "using the machinery one has and getting on with the world as it is" is not the same thing as coming to regard that machinery as incapable of improvement and the world as incapable of being other than it is. There is no use in a boy cherishing the abstract ideal of writing plays like Shakespeare, or clever books like Mr. Chesterton, if he will not settle down to learn English. The only people who improve the state of practical politics are people who believe in practical politics.

Mr. Chesterton's own phrase, unwittingly no doubt, is fatal to his own argument. He says, "in middle age they"—ideals—"all break up like clouds." Yes. And, when the clouds break, there is rain. And the rain makes the flowers grow, and cleanses the atmosphere, and washes out the gutters.

Mr. Chesterton writes of "a certain way of looking at life, which was created in me by the fairy tales, but has since been meekly ratified by the mere facts." In so far as he gives us any actual examples of these processes of

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## *On Castles in the Air*

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creation and ratification, he makes it plain that the benefit he derived from fairy tales was that they taught him certain things which are not fairy tales but facts. He got from Jack the Giant Killer the notion of "manly mutiny against pride as such." He got from Cinderella the lesson "of the Magnificat—*exaltavit humiles*." He did not get from fairy tales a belief in fairy tales. He got from fairy tales a belief in facts. He does not believe that coaches can be made out of pumpkins, but he does believe that the miserable can be made happy.

The ethics of Elfland turn out, after all, to be the ethics of earth. With a good deal that Mr. Chesterton writes about magic and spells and enchantments it is quite impossible to argue. When a man says that "a tree grows fruit because it is a magic tree," he puts himself beyond the reach of any argument that one could use. Presumably a man has children because he is a magic man, or writes books because he is a magic man, or does any creative act because he is a magic man. This is supposed to prove that there is no such thing as

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unalterable law. If it were true, it would only prove that there is an unalterable law named magic.

“It is no argument for unalterable law (as Huxley fancied) that we count on the ordinary course of things. We do not count on it. We bet on it.” In this statement, as in so many other of his statements, Mr. Chesterton attempts to be impressive by being impertinent. For we *do* count on the ordinary course of things.

Again and again in this book of his Mr. Chesterton confuses the issue by mere wealth of analogy and recklessness of assertion. “You cannot *imagine* two and one not making three. But you can easily imagine trees not growing fruit; you can imagine them growing golden candlesticks.”

That fruit trees sometimes do not grow fruit is not a matter of imagination at all. It is a matter of fact. And, if you have a fruit tree that does not bear, your gardener will invariably be able to tell you why. Mr. Chesterton might in a speculative mood have a bet with me that a cherry tree of mine will not

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## *On Castles in the Air*

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grow cherries. But he would not have a bet with me that it will grow candlesticks.

There is a similar confusion and a similar irresponsibility of phrase all through this book, but especially all through this chapter of it. Having told us that he learned from Jack the Giant Killer that "the rebel is older than all the kingdoms," Mr. Chesterton tells us a few pages later that "I never could join the young men of my time in feeling what they called the general sentiment of revolt."

This inability arose from the fact that he "did not feel disposed to resist any rule merely because it was mysterious."

I do not know who these young men of Mr. Chesterton's time were, but I should like to hear of the man among them who proposed to resist a rule "merely because it was mysterious." I would undertake to bet Mr. Chesterton any odds that what these young men of his time objected to was being called upon to *accept* any rule "merely because it was mysterious." They claimed the right to examine the rules to see that they made for what is called "playing the game." And if they came upon a rule

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which looked as if it was put in to give some one an unfair advantage, they did not see that it was an incontestible argument for its retention, that it always appeared to have been there, and that nobody knew who put it there.

Nobody questions the rule that a man must eat. But many people question the rule that he must eat flesh. I do not sympathize with these people, mainly because they mostly look so ostentatiously in need of sympathy. But I recognize that it is one thing to say a man must eat to live, and quite another to say he must eat flesh to live well.

The "general sentiment of revolt" which characterizes our time might more accurately be called the general demand for inquiry. And, if it be true that a man "cannot by searching find out God," it is also true that he can by searching find out that he cannot find him.

The one thing that Mr. Chesterton never faces in this book is the situation that arises when one comes to deal with those parts of the fairy tales that are fairy tales. He shirks the question of what is to be done when the part

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## *On Castles in the Air*

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of a fairy tale that is a fairy tale comes into violent collision with the part of a fairy tale that is a fact. It does not meet the needs of the case to deny the collision, for the collision was the real cause of Mr. Chesterton's book.

He tells us why he believes in fairy tales. He also tells us when he believes in facts. It is when they do not contradict fairy tales.

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## CHAPTER VI—*The Flag of the Other World*

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**M**R. CHESTERTON proceeds, in a chapter entitled "The Flag of the World," to set out the view that our attitude to life can best be expressed "in terms of a kind of military loyalty." And this after he has told us in the previous chapter not to believe in "unalterable law." For once there is no paradox in the terms in which the author's attitude is expressed. For it is precisely "a kind of military loyalty" that is the attitude of the Christian towards life. He is a person under orders, and the unalterable law of his existence is that he must obey. He must not question, or, if he does, he must keep his questioning to himself, and go on doing the thing the righteousness of which he questions until such time as he has made up his mind to face the penalties of revolt. And, when he does that, he will still be regarded as a soldier by the authorities, and they will keep on treating him as an insubordinate and

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## *The Flag of the Other World*

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rebellious soldier as long as he lives, and—so they tell him—for ever and ever afterwards.

But Mr. Chesterton has a genius for picking out the attractive part of unattractive things, and making them look as though they are not parts but the whole. Thus he tells us that the world “is the fortress of our family, with the flag flying on the turret,” a very pretty, and, rightly understood, a very true notion. The trouble is that the Christian with his “military loyalty” persists in the assertion that the fortress, albeit the present home of the whole family of us, really belongs to his branch of the family; and that the flag, if things were as they should be, should not be the flag of the kingdom of man, but the flag of the regiment to which he belongs, and so should have a cross upon it.

The result of this is something like civil war. The fortress, at the very moment when it seems secure from external attack, is endangered by internal division. The flag, on the very day when it should be floating boldly



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in the breeze, is hauled down while an inquiry is held as to what right it had ever to have been run up.

“Military loyalty” is the worst kind of loyalty there is, although, alas, we have not yet learned to recognize it as such. As these lines are being written, Europe is being deluged with the blood of the men she can least afford to lose, the young strong men, in order to save her from the domination of mere “military loyalty” in the future. The only military loyalty that is worth a fig is not military loyalty. The loyalty of the soldiers of the Allies in this war is not, strictly speaking, military loyalty, although it can find no more effective expression than in military forms. The loyalty of the Prussian is military loyalty; and it is treachery to the welfare of the human family. A man who is compelled to fight may, no doubt, be as good a soldier as as a volunteer. But the essence of the only militarism that is not vile and demoralizing is voluntarism. And the essence of the militarism that is vile and demoralizing is compulsion. The “military loyalty” of which Mr. Chester-

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ton writes will be found to belong to the latter class. Compulsion is its essence.

Writing of the origins of morality, Mr. Chesterton says that men "did not cultivate cleanliness. They purified themselves for the altar, and found that they were clean." Leaving aside the question as to why they never felt any need of purifying themselves for their own comfort, this is the result. Men became clean because they were commanded to become clean. Or, as Mr. Chesterton himself puts it, "the Ten Commandments . . . were merely military commands; a code of regimental orders."

Now military commands may be necessary when a fortress is being used as a fortress, but they are not necessary when it is being used as a residence. Regimental orders are all very well when the enemy is abroad, but we want none of them when the family is at home. The Christian attitude towards life as represented by Mr. Chesterton—and in this respect he certainly does not misrepresent it—is an attempt to run a fighting army as a family party, and a family party as a military engage-

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ment. In both aspects of it the attempt is doomed to failure. It was not always so. In the days of the Christian domination of Europe it was otherwise. But I doubt if even Mr. Chesterton really wishes to see a return to the Middle Ages.

The Middle Ages were the Christian Ages, and from them we can see how Christian principles work out. We will begin with that question of cleanliness to which reference has been made already. Mr. Chesterton told us, it will be remembered, that men purified themselves for the altar, and so they became clean. That is to say they became clean in obedience to a command. But in the Middle Ages there were men who deliberately became dirty for the sake of the altar, and that is the sort of reaction that comes from mere obedience to external sanctions.

The Jew, to whom the command was first given, became clean in order that he might worship; and the Christian was so occupied with the necessity of worship that he forgot to be clean. He went further and turned this forgetfulness into a virtue, thinking to show

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## *The Flag of the Other World*

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by a filthy habit of body an immaculate cleanliness of soul.

I remember sitting at lunch with a French community settled in England, and during the meal the usual ascetical reading went on. On this occasion, the work read was the life of the pious founder of the community, and I shall never forget the faces of two English members of the community during the reading of a passage describing this holy man's mortifications in the way of voluntary dirtiness. Impatience, disgust, pity, and above all, I thought, anger that this passage should have been read at meal-time, and in the presence of a critical visitor.

It is a proverb of man's invention that "cleanliness is next to godliness." Cleanliness had a great struggle for that position. It was found, even in comparatively recent times, that sanctity had no great love of soap. The movements that have made personal and public cleanliness so general that to-day it seems incredible that they should have been rare have been movements that have originated not in an external command, but in human necessity

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and in human affection. They have been voluntary movements. The places in the (Christian) world to-day that are the most dirty are the places that are the most Christian.

It is such a fact as this that answers out of hand all Mr. Chesterton has to say about the way in which Christianity combines necessary rest and necessary restlessness. He says : " We have to feel the universe at once as an ogre's castle, to be stormed, and yet as our own cottage, to which we can return at evening."

For twenty centuries Christians have been regarding the universe as an ogre's castle that had to be stormed. But it is only since Christianity has been driven in advanced countries to think a little less of the ogre that it has displayed some hesitating and yet willing inclination to regard the universe as " our own cottage to which we may return at evening." Rationalism has almost succeeded in freeing the cottage from the ogre ; presently it will succeed in banishing him from the universe in which, of course, he has not, and never has had, any real existence.

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## *The Flag of the Other World*

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It all comes back to that argument with which this chapter began about loyalty. "Military loyalty," which is Mr. Chesterton's attitude towards life, is essentially blind loyalty. The Christian is the real determinist if determinism is the gloomy thing he pictures it. There is no greater or, perhaps I should say, meaner Fatalism than belief in the Christian revelation. Because men have believed in it for many centuries they are fighting each other to-day in the bloody fields of France and Flanders. The Belgian peasant is blown to atoms while he kneels at a wayside shrine ; the French peasant is torn open by a shell while he recites the rosary ; the Russian peasant stops to kiss an icon and his bending head is blown off his body ; the English peasant reads his khaki-bound New Testament by the wayside, and meditates on the statement that "two sparrows are sold for a farthing. And one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore ; ye are of more value than many sparrows." While he is yet meditating, a shot brings him

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to the ground, and his closing eyes behold many sparrows chirping on the road. These are the things that follow in the wake of the "military loyalty" view of life. There is nothing more orthodox than war. And there is nothing that is at root so abominable.

The Visible Head of Christendom has sent his blessing to all his children who are soldiers, but he has been powerless to stop them from fighting one another. Why? Because in so far as they are all children of the Christian faith they have all this poison of "military loyalty," obedience, submission, in their blood.

It is the loyalty that comes of revolt that will save the world, the loyalty of man to man, of the citizen to the community, of the brother to the brotherhood. It is the warfare against superstition and ignorance, the warfare of the school, the hospital, the laboratory, the Trade Union, that will set the wide world free.

Every one of the characteristics of Christianity that fills Mr. Chesterton with satisfaction is not a peculiar characteristic of Christianity at all. And, if it could be given him to come back to this world when men have

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## *The Flag of the Other World*

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entered into a larger share of the possessions of humanity than they at present possess, he would find them still with fairy tales, more fairy tales than ever before because they would have a greater appreciation of them than Christians ever had ; he would find the world the fortress of our family, with the flag flying on the turret, and when he entered the fortress he would discover that the happy rivalries of peace had succeeded the cruel rivalries of war and had been found not less exciting.

It may be said that this is mere prophecy. I say that it is the only future thing of which we can be reasonably certain. The victory that the Flag of the Other World could never inspire will be won by the bloodless warfare of the gallant soldiers of humanity who fight for the Flag of the World.



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## CHAPTER VII—*The Christianity of Paradoxes*

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IT is a rather easy thing to write in paradoxes. If you will try to do it, you will be surprised not only at the easiness of the business, but at the fact that you can make sense of almost everything you have written. Most popular sayings or proverbs, for example, look quite well turned upside down ; and very often when they have been turned upside down they seem to be the right way up. To say that sin covers a multitude of charity is certainly not less true than to say that charity covers a multitude of sins. Also it is no difficult matter to invent analogies and comparisons that are arresting by reason of their grotesqueness. Thus, I may say of a weak, decadent artist that he set out for the realms of gold but somehow he could never get beyond the *Golden Lion*. Or I may, by the simpler process of ordinary alliteration, say of this man that he sought immortality and found intoxication.

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## *The Christianity of Paradoxes*

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Again, I may say of a writer who points out obvious things in an original way something like this : It is interesting to hear of the beauty of Switzerland and of the immorality of Paris. But it gives us a shock to hear of the beauty of Battersea Park and the immorality of Baker Street.

Now, the only thing against this sort of writing is that it is so easy. Once a man begins it, he finds himself doing it almost unconsciously before long. If you confine yourself to conventional modes of expression, it may sometimes take you an hour to write a sentence. For if you use words ordinarily you must be at the pains of writing what is intelligible. But if you use words fantastically you make the appalling discovery that you can write much more attractively, and with very little trouble. Eccentricity in writing, like eccentricity in dress, is very often a mere cloak to hide a want of brains rather than the signal of their existence. It is, generally speaking, the poet who is not a poet who wears long hair.

These remarks are not by way of diagnosis of Mr. Chesterton's method of writing. Nor

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are they in any exact sense a description of it. To say that he uses fantastic forms of words because he is not over-blessed with brains would be to make a statement not only untrue, but preposterously untrue. He could use any form of words he chose and be free from the suspicion of mere journalistic trickery.

It seems to me, nevertheless, that Mr. Chesterton's amazingly clever use of a fantastic style of writing has made him impervious to some weighty matters that he ought to have considered. His excess of logic prevents him from being logical. He misses the point in the very dexterity of his definition of it. The nimbleness of his mind and of his wit are responsible for his somewhat trying habit of darting into a new theme before he has half exhausted the old one. It is often literally true of him that he cannot see the wood for the trees.

In the chapter of his book which I have now to consider, Mr. Chesterton begins by saying that the real trouble with the world "is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite." The real trouble with Mr. Chesterton is exactly the

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## *The Christianity of Paradoxes*

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same. And the real danger of Mr. Chesterton's apologetic is that it is often so near the truth as to be mistaken for it, even by himself.

There is a saying that a half-truth is worse than a lie ; but ninety-nine hundredths of truth plus one hundredth of error is the worst error of all because it is so near the truth. All teetotal drinks are abominable things, but none is so abominable as the teetotal drink that is bottled and labelled and coloured like, and called, ale. It holds not only the physical danger of being a dispiriting and gassy concoction, but the mental danger of being mistaken for a rational drink. It is an awful thing to have the pleasant anticipation of a glad heart and then to experience a stomach-ache.

When Mr. Chesterton writes, as he does in the chapter of *Orthodoxy* now before us, of "The Paradoxes of Christianity," we get full measure of his qualities as a writer, but we also get full measure of the defects of those qualities. And that is why I have tried, possibly with indifferent success, to set out at the beginning of this chapter what those qualities and defects are.

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It is a suspicious practice to begin an argument with a supposition. A supposition at the end of an argument is often a reasonable supposition justified by the argument that has preceded it. But a supposition at the beginning of an argument is mostly an attempt to give an unreasonable argument the air of rationality.

Mr. Chesterton begins this chapter with a supposition. It is as follows : " Suppose some mathematical creature from the moon were to reckon up the human body ; he would at once see that the essential thing about it was that it was duplicate. A man is two men, he on the right exactly resembling him on the left. Having noted that there was an arm on the right and one on the left, a leg on the right and one on the left " (and so on through all the duplicate parts), " he would take it as a law ; and then, where he found a heart on one side, would deduce that there was another heart on the other. And just then, where he most felt he was right, he would be wrong."

The mistake of the " mathematical creature

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## *The Christianity of Paradoxes*

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from the moon " is supposed to be the mistake of the Rationalist. But it is the weakness of Mr. Chesterton's argument that he had to "suppose" the creature from the moon in order to make his accusation against Rationalism appear rational. He could not have begun the argument right away by saying: "Suppose a Rationalist from Manchester were to reckon up the human body," etc., because there is no Rationalist in Manchester or anywhere else who would make the mistake upon which his argument depends. But then, as our author artlessly confesses, "it is very hard for a man to defend anything of which he is entirely convinced." The difficulty is not decreased, I should rather say it is increased, when you have become entirely convinced of a thing by a series of most unconvincing processes. I confess I am amazed at the things that made Mr. Chesterton a Christian. He sets some of them down in this chapter, and I will now hastily examine one or two of them.

"It was Huxley and Herbert Spencer and Bradlaugh who brought me back to orthodox theology," says Mr. Chesterton. Let us see

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how they did it. First of all, they contradicted themselves.

The superficial reader of Mr. Chesterton will probably remark, "Surely it is his case that everything *is* a contradiction." To which I reply that his case is nothing like so reasonable as that. His case is that contradictions in Christianity are all parts of the great whole, paradoxes of infinite significance. But contradictions in Rationalism must be tested at their face value. It must never be admitted that *they* may not be contradictions at all.

This is the first contradiction that Mr. Chesterton discovered in the case for Rationalism. "One accusation against Christianity was that it prevented men, by morbid tears and terrors, from seeking joy and liberty in the bosom of Nature. But another accusation was that it comforted men with a fictitious providence, and put them in a pink and white nursery. . . . One rationalist had hardly done calling Christianity a nightmare before another began to call it a fool's paradise."

There is a saying that provides a simple reconciliation of these alleged contradictions.

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## *The Christianity of Paradoxes*

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It is the saying that there are people who are never happy except when they are miserable.

One of these criticisms was of Christianity in its social aspect, and the other was a criticism directed to the personal aspect. Christianity robs a man of the joys of this life by such teaching as this: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Then, by way of compensation for this horrible ultimatum, Christianity says that if a man does not love this world and the things in it he shall be watched over very carefully in all the dangers of its ungodly happiness, and he shall have everlasting felicity after he is dead. There is no contradiction in asserting that both these doctrines are evil. The first because it makes life a penalty, instead of a pleasure; the second because it makes man a selfish and outlandish sort of optimist, whose personal optimism about the world to come is conditional on his being a pessimistic pest in the world that now is. If Mr. Chesterton can get any Catholic priest to introduce him to a



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Catholic of great scrupulosity, or if he will spend a Sunday morning at the nearest meeting-place of the Plymouth Brethren, he will see the people of whom it is literally true that they are never happy but when they are miserable, and he ought to see that this contradiction of the Rationalist's is no contradiction at all.

Another of these Rationalistic contradictions in the criticism of Christianity was this. "The very people who reproached Christianity with the meekness and non-resistance of the monasteries were the very people who reproached it also with the violence and valour of the Crusades. . . . I had got thoroughly angry with the Christian, because he was never angry. And now I was told to be angry with him because his anger had been the most huge and horrible thing in human history." I have tried very hard to see that these criticisms are mutually destructive, but I can find nothing but rational criticism in them.

I do not wish to introduce irrelevant matter, but it is almost a necessity here to call attention to the fact that, whatever the Christianity

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## *The Christianity of Paradoxes*

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of Mr. Chesterton and the Church may be, it is not the teaching of Christ. If Christ taught one thing clearly that thing was non-resistance. And non-resistance as he taught it is nonsense. The Church has never attempted to carry this teaching out, but it has pretended to be carrying it out in the very repudiation of it. I do not blame any Christian for not attempting to obey literally the Sermon on the Mount, but I do blame every Christian who tries to keep up the hypocrisy that to disobey it is to obey it in spirit. In the Cambridge Bible series, the volume on St. Luke—by the late Dean Farrar—contains a flagrant example of this hypocrisy. In commenting on Christ's statement: "Give to every man that asketh of thee," the writer says: "The spirit of our Lord's precept is now best fulfilled by *not* giving to every man that asks."

This has been a digression, and I must return from the teaching of Christ to the teaching of Christianity, and to these alleged contradictions in the criticism of it. Christianity may be rightly blamed both for its tenet of

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irrational meekness for the individual, and for its tenet of irrational massacre for the community. For the one is the complement of the other.

The Christian must be meek, so that the Church may inherit the earth. It was the meekness of the monasteries that made possible the violence of the Crusades. It is the history of Christian meekness that it has never been displayed when meekness was needed. And it is the history of Christian violence that it has never been in evidence when violence was really required. Christianity showed no meekness in the sixteenth century in an orgy of violence, and no violence in the eighteenth century in a debauch of meekness. It always commanded men to be meek when they had something to fight for, and to be warlike when they had nothing to fight against. It fought against the Turk for the Holy Sepulchre, which is supposed to have contained the body of Christ, but it would not fight against the capitalist for the body of the child-labourer, although it professed to believe that body the Temple of the Holy Ghost.

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## *The Christianity of Paradoxes*

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And so with all the rest of the contradictions which Mr. Chesterton discovered in the Rationalistic propaganda. They are contradictions only in the sense that Mr. Chesterton's catalogue of the clashing virtues of Christianity is a series of contradictions. He tells us it is the glory of Christianity that it is paradoxical, and then the critic, when he sees the paradox but fails to see the glory, is soundly thrashed on the assumption that there is not a paradox in the whole creed of Christendom.

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## CHAPTER VIII—*The Eternal Repetition*

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**B**Y the Eternal Revolution, which is the subject of his next chapter, Mr. Chesterton seems to mean that the world is being made better by the Christian influences at work upon it, and that the main virtue of the improvements is that they are reactions. The principle, if such it can be called, reminds me of the Catholic doctrine of Development. There is the Deposit of Faith which has been given "once for all," the process of revelation which is over and done with. But the Church's explicit knowledge of the contents of this Deposit, and of the full significance thereof, is not instantaneous but progressive. Thus it comes to pass that the infallibility of the Pope is, for those who hold this doctrine, as much a part of the Christian faith as the sinlessness of Christ. Just because the Catholic Christian begins by solving every riddle there are always more riddles for him to solve; and precisely because he begins with an act of re-

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## *The Eternal Repetition*

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signation he is for ever committing acts of war; the impregnable fortress is eternally on the defensive just because it is impregnable.

Mr. Chesterton carries this paradox over into the field of social action and tells us: "You cannot even say that there is victory or superiority in nature unless you have some doctrine about what things are superior." You cannot argue about the contents of the Deposit of Faith until you have decided that there is a Deposit. You cannot argue about the significance of what Christ said to Peter if you regard it as highly problematical whether Christ said anything at all to Peter or to anyone else. You cannot debate the question of the godhead of Jesus until you are satisfied about his manhood. These are very obvious statements, but such obvious statements are just the statements in most danger of being carelessly and irrelevantly made.

We see with an almost indecent alacrity what principles involve for our opponents, but we are frequently uncommonly slow to recognize that the same principles involve the same

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things for all of us. I remember picking up some years ago a volume of a magazine of Mr. Kensit's. It contained an example of this sort of inconsistency so remarkable that I made a note of it. I found on one page a heated denunciation of pictures as aids to devotion. For some inscrutable reason it appeared that to have a picture of Christ in a place dedicated to his worship was to dishonour him. Mr. Kensit, who, I make no doubt, would knock down a man who spat at the photograph of his mother, would rather admire a man who tore down and burned a picture of the mother of Christ. I was still thinking about this strange state of mind, turning over the pages of this magazine carelessly the while, when my eye caught an article about a picture. It was a picture of which Mr. Kensit had some copies to sell, depicting, I think, a hunted Protestant reading a hidden Bible. And this is what the article said about the sort of pictures we should have in our houses. In buying a picture we should consider "whether its teaching portrays a link in the chain of truth; whether it records or

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## *The Eternal Repetition*

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interprets anything unfamiliar ; whether it adds one single stone to our heaven-pointed pyramid, cuts away one dark bough, or levels one hillock in our path." This is an advertisement by a man with something to sell, it is not art criticism, and it is not theology ; but it is an advertisement by a man in whose sincerity in his bigotry it will do us no harm to believe, and who does not see that in this praise of the moral use of pictures he has handed himself over gagged and bound to the Jesuit who was only waiting round the corner for something of this sort to happen !

The coupling of their names will I fear seriously annoy both of them, but I am bound to say I think there are many resemblances between Mr. Kensit and Mr. Chesterton. And the principal point of resemblance is that they see what certain standards imply for other people, but they do not see what their own standards imply for themselves. Mr. Kensit, for example, does not see that he cannot sell pictures of the founder of the Kensit Crusade at one shop in the City, and at the same time object to another Christian shopkeeper



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selling pictures of the founder of the Christian religion. Mr. Chesterton does not see that he cannot say that "except for some human or divine theory there is no principle in nature" in order to dish the Rationalist, and at the same time denounce the Rationalist for saying the same thing with this addendum that personally he (the Rationalist) is for the human theory against the divine. As I said at the outset of these criticisms, Mr. Chesterton's position is that a man can eat his cake and have it too.

Mr. Chesterton would have the mere Rationalist to be very precise in his language while, at the same time, he denounces him for not making use of the language of the people, which notoriously lacks precision. But no man is more precise, nay pedantic, in his use of words than Mr. Chesterton; and no man so frequently manages to miss their common meaning. Thus he tells us that he prefers the word reform to the words progress and evolution. But of these three words the word reform is the word which most frequently is used without the significance that Mr. Chester-

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## *The Eternal Repetition*

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ton considers its advantage over the others : i.e. that reform implies form.

To take the first two instances that come to my mind. Tariff Reform meant the reform of something which didn't exist. Poor Law Reform means, in the mouths of those who most often write and talk about it, the abolition of the Poor Law.

The fact is that Mr. Chesterton is precise when he should be careless and careless when he should be precise.

A quite true story, which is as amusing as it is significant, is told of a well-known Irish Member of Parliament. He was about to start out on a Home Rule campaign, and he called at the office of the United Irish League for his itinerary. As he was leaving the secretary said to him : "Here ! stick this bundle of leaflets in your pocket—all the facts brought up to date." To which the Irish Member of Parliament impatiently replied : "Och ! what do I want wid facts : gineralties are good enough for me."

It was quite true. Generalities were good enough for him because he had had twenty-

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five years' daily contact with the facts. He knew that he could arouse more sympathy and enthusiasm for Ireland by stories of bad laws in operation than by the precise analysis of the bad laws, or the careful exposition of better ones.

It is the man who knows who can deal in generalities ; it is the man who is concerned to prove that somebody else doesn't know who must deal only in facts.

Dealing with the idea of progress, or advance, or reform, Mr. Chesterton says : "The only intelligible sense that progress or advance can have among men, is that we have a definite vision, and that we wish to make the whole world like that vision." This is the generalization of the man who does not realize the facts ; hence it is an utterly unconvincing generalization.

The Christian in the Middle Ages had a "definite vision," and wished "to make the whole world like that vision," or, perhaps it would be more true to say he wished to *keep* the whole world like that vision. His condition was that he thought his vision so good that

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## *The Eternal Repetition*

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he was prepared to burn men alive rather than they should move away from it. But the vision that inspires modern progress is not so much the vision of better things to come as the vision of bad things that now exist. The Rationalist does not find it necessary to have an exact vision of the sort of healthy dwellings that will be erected on the site of the slum to convince him that slums are an abomination. He does not worry his head about what he will do when he has recovered from an illness before he has sent for the doctor. The vision of things that exist may be quite as inspiring, and often is more inspiring, than the vision of things that do not exist. It is the vision of a miserable man who exists that moves men to try and make him happy, not the vision of the happiness which he does not possess.

Progress will not come by dreaming of it but by working for it. And it is a fact as plain as the nose on my face that such progress as has been made has been made much more by a grim consciousness of realities than by an airy vision of possibilities.

Mr. Chesterton wants to make men dream

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in order to make them move. It is not surprising if they go to sleep in order to dream. But the Rationalist wants to wake men up in order to make them move.

Mr. Chesterton says to the slum dweller : “ Try and have a fixed vision of a pleasant and clean and airy and beautiful home. It will inspire you *so* much.” And the Rationalist says to the slum dweller : “ Take a look at this room of yours, and when you have seen the dirt of years that is a part of it, and when you have taken a good look at that bed whereon you and your wife and your two children are huddled together at night because there is not room for another, even if you had the money to get it, and when you have got it well into your head that somewhere there is a man who is living in wealth and plenty by poisoning and putrifying and slowly murdering you and thousands of people like you in holes like this—then tell me, how long are you going to stand it ? ” I do not think there will be much dispute as to which is the more practically inspiring of these two methods.

The Eternal Revolution of Mr. Chesterton's

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## *The Eternal Repetition*

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philosophy is not a revolution at all; it is a repetition. It is a repetition that was repeated for more than seventeen hundred years, and, at the end of that time, the only progress it had made was a progression from bad to worse. Since then all the things that Mr. Chesterton hates — doubt, inquiry, dull methodical research, rooting about in the intricacies of things—all these things have been going on, and from them has come a tendency that is gradually rising into a triumph, and which has done more for the happiness and freedom of mankind than religion did in all the years of its domination.

Mr. Chesterton is fond of having a fixed test. The demand for a fixed test is a mere ruse to get the Rationalist to make his own coffin. There can no more be a fixed test by which to judge every detail of the complicated processes of human emancipation than there can be one test by which to discover whether milk is good and whether a sovereign is good. But, in so far as any standard of judgment is possible, there is an old standard that I learned in a Sunday School that will do as well as

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any other. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Judged by that, which is its own standard, Christianity must be found wanting by every man who does not believe that judgment, like justice, should be blind. Weighed in that, which is its own balance, Christianity must be found wanting by every man who does not tamper with the scales.

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## CHAPTER IX—*The Realism of Orthodoxy*

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THE purpose of that chapter of Mr. Chesterton's book which is headed "The Romance of Orthodoxy" is, he explains, to show that the ideas of the modern free-thinker are "definitely illiberal." The chapter begins with one of those wordy exercises to lead up to a point that Mr. Chesterton is so fond of. Unfortunately, however, when we have been led up to the point we discover that there is no point. The chief defect of our age, we are told, is not bustle and strenuousness, but laziness and fatigue.

"Take one quite external case," says Mr. Chesterton. "The streets are noisy with taxi-cabs and motor-cars ; but this is not due to human activity but to human repose. There would be less bustle if there were more activity, if people were simply walking about." The fact is that we ride in taxi-cabs and motor-omnibuses not because we are too lazy to walk, but because we are too active to walk. If it is my duty to keep six appointments in the course



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of the day, and I walk to the first two of them, which are at opposite ends of London, I shall have to miss the other four. And if I happen to be employed by a business man who sends me out to make these calls I shall find, when I return to his office, that he by no means agrees with Mr. Chesterton that I have put in an exceedingly active day. When one has no responsibility one can idle. You may see the butcher's errand boy with his bicycle propped against some wall while he plays marbles, boisterously indifferent to the business of the butcher, and the cooks' of his customers. You will see a man taking his children for a walk across Hampstead Heath on a Sunday morning; but you will not see him taking a walk to the City on Monday morning. He does not walk on Sunday because he feels particularly active, any more than he rides on Monday because he feels particularly lazy. He conducts himself in a reasonable fashion, and so he thinks it would be silly to ride across Hampstead Heath on a Sunday when he has nothing to do after being shut up in some office for a week; just as he knows that if he walked to the City

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## *The Realism of Orthodoxy*

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on a Monday he would be indulging himself with a selfish waste of energy.

Mr. Chesterton has tried to prove the times are not strenuous, and he has only succeeded in proving that they are not slow. He has attempted to show that the modern man is a laggard, and he has demonstrated that he is a labourer.

This sort of thing is always happening to Mr. Chesterton. There is another example of it on the very next page. "It is often suggested that all Liberals ought to be free-thinkers, because they ought to love everything that is free." This statement having been made, some space is devoted to refuting it. But it did not need refuting because it was never said—except by Mr. Chesterton. To say that all Liberals ought to be free-thinkers because they ought to love everything that is free is to talk the arrant rubbish which free-thinkers are given to talking in Mr. Chesterton's pages, but which is notably absent from their conversation elsewhere. To be a Liberal means, in one aspect of the matter, *not* to believe in everything free. But to be a Liberal

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*does* mean to believe in freedom of thought. And the Catholic Church, knowing more about these things than Mr. Chesterton, has a common name for all believers in freedom of thought. Throughout Europe, and throughout the world, she calls them—Liberals.

Mr. Chesterton says: "In actual modern Europe a free-thinker does not mean a man who thinks for himself. It means a man who, having thought for himself, has come to one particular class of conclusions. . . ."

This is like saying that an efficient baker is really a baking machine, because, having studied and thought about the various methods of baking bread, he has come to the conclusion that a particular class of process is the best. But this is the very man who will be the first to give any new method of baking a trial. When he concluded that a certain process was the best he knew, he did not also conclude that no man had ever known or would ever know a better.

And because the free-thinker has arrived at certain conclusions he has not ceased to think freely. He arrived at those conclusions by

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## *The Realism of Orthodoxy*

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thinking for himself, and he is prepared to defend, revise, or abandon any one of them by the same process of free-thinking. He is called a free-thinker, not so much because of his conclusions as because of his method, which is the reverse method to that of the Church.

Mr. Chesterton begins to show that the ideas of the modern free-thinker are "definitely illiberal" by telling us about the ideas of the "liberalizers of theology" who are no more free-thinkers than Mr. Chesterton. What he calls "the notes of the new theology or the modernist church" may be dismissed the issue for they have nothing to do with it. The new theology has no more ruthless opponent than the free-thinker. He understands that there is a case to be made out for Authority, and a case to be made out for Reason, and that there is no case for the elusive theology that rejects both.

Coming to what may more properly be regarded as the ground occupied by the free-thinker, Mr. Chesterton is concerned to show that there is nothing particularly liberal in a

denial of miracles. The liberal idea of freedom is, he thinks, somehow bound up with belief in the miraculous. We will look at this matter for a moment.

What is a miracle? Mr. Chesterton's definition is this: "A miracle simply means the swift control of matter by mind." It may be admitted that this meaning is frequently attached to the word miracle as it is used in ordinary life. Thus, if a man appears to be walking to certain death when he crosses a road and does not notice an approaching motor-omnibus until it seems to the observer he is too late, and if that man, with incredible dexterity both of mind and body at the last moment, escapes without a scratch, some passer-by will certainly remark that it was a miracle. And so it was if a miracle is nothing more than "the swift control of matter by mind."

But this is not the Christian theologian's idea of a miracle. In comparatively modern times some theologians have adopted and expressed this view of some miracles. Old John Newton, for example, applied it to the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand in

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## *The Realism of Orthodoxy*

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one of the few theological poems that are great poetry :

“ Full soon celestially fed  
    Their rustic fare they take,  
’Twas Spring-time when He blest the bread,  
    ’Twas Harvest when He brake.”

But what set the theologians a-seeking these plausible explanations of miracles? It used to be the glory of the miraculous that it was miraculous. Now we are asked to believe that the great characteristic of miracles is that they are not miracles.

Mr. Chesterton is concerned to show that a denial of the miraculous is “ definitely illiberal ” rather than to discuss the general question of miracles. It seems to me that he answers himself in this as in many other cases. For he says : “ If a man cannot believe in miracles there is an end of the matter ; he is not particularly liberal, but he is perfectly honourable and logical, which are much better things.” How can the statement that disbelief in the miraculous is “ definitely illiberal ” be reconciled with this ?

The case is in need of statement in its

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positive aspect. I will therefore endeavour to show why the man who rejects the miraculous is more on the side of the liberal idea of freedom than the man who believes in it.

The miraculous, not perhaps in the watered down edition of the new theologians, but certainly in the Old Testament and in the Catholic Church, means that there is at the back of this universe of ours a Person who can do what he likes with it and with us. And because he is subject to no law we can never be certain, while we believe in him, that we may regard anything as a law at all. He can make the sun stand still and so put the spheres out of joint ; he can bring forth an evil beast to devour us in Fleet Street if we laugh at Mr. Chesterton, just as he sent a couple of beasts to devour a couple of little children who made fun of another of his prophets ; he can fill our beds with lice and cover our bodies with sores ; he can strike us dead and bring us to life again three months afterwards—to the great discomfort of the Insurance Companies. These are some samples of the things the power

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## *The Realism of Orthodoxy*

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above us can do if the real, out-and-out, view of the miraculous is true. And if these things could be done "the liberal idea of freedom" would be at an end. For the liberal idea of freedom involves that it shall be possible to make progress, not indeed without difficulty and sometimes disaster, but without difficulties and disasters of the sort that I have just described.

It is only when he perceives, by some such crude description as I have written, what the miraculous *is* that the average man realizes that he does, in fact, conduct the whole business of his life without reference to supernatural sanctions and miraculous possibilities.

Mr. Chesterton, who tells us in this book that "the phrases of the street are not only forcible but subtle" is probably aware that when the man in the street says of any other man "God help him" he regards that man as beyond help.

It is only man that helps man; and it is because the free-thinker realizes this more clearly than others that he is a greater help to



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mankind than the man who feels he has always God to fall back upon in case of emergency. The liberal idea of freedom is the life of free-thought. And the liberal idea of freedom will be the death of Christianity.

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CHAPTER X—*Reason and the  
Mis-Adventurer*

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I WAS surprised to find in the concluding chapter of Mr. Chesterton's book an appeal to individual experience as an apologetic. The Rev. Dr. Horton, with whom Mr. Chesterton has, I think, had words in his time, says in a recent book of apologetics after the modernist model: "That apologetic is barren which meets rationalism with rationalism and labours to establish an historical reality independently of a religious experience." When I read this statement it occurred to me that I should like to see a duel between Dr. Horton and Mr. Chesterton about it, and I was pretty certain that Mr. Chesterton would win. No Christian writer I knew of had such a healthy contempt for the statement that is a common cant of the modernists, that we must refer back the appeal as to the credentials of Christianity from history to something called "religious experience."

And now my dream of seeing Dr. Horton

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and Mr. Chesterton engaged in this duel is over. For Mr. Chesterton has to this extent gone over to the modernists that he says his evidences for Christianity are made up "of loose but living experiences." It is true that he also calls these loose but living experiences "an enormous accumulation of small but unanimous facts." It is just possible that he intends to appeal to them as facts and not as experiences, at all events in the modernist sense of the latter word. But this is not clear in the book, and I come at the end of my examination of it to the expression of an opinion that has been growing slowly as I have gone through it, that for all his rampant orthodoxy Mr. Chesterton is a little bit of a heretic.

I do not intend to pursue what seem to be the beginnings of something that is not orthodoxy in Mr. Chesterton, but to suppose that I am misled by what may be an unconsidered phrase, and to proceed to the end treating Mr. Chesterton as the most orthodox of all the Christians.

I am sorry to say that the "loose but living experiences" and the "enormous accumula-

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tion of small but unanimous facts" that are Mr. Chesterton's "evidences for Christianity" have eluded me in this book until now, and I have looked for them many times in this last chapter to which they rightly belong, but without finding them. Mr. Chesterton says that when he looked at various anti-Christian truths he found they were not true. But his finding them untrue does not help us very much. He thinks, he believes, that Christianity is true. I think and believe that it is false. He thinks it is the hope of the world. I think the world's hope is that it is passing away. Who is to decide between us?

We are both quite sincere, both quite honourable in our opinions; but which of us is right? I am afraid the only way of deciding that is to appeal to the facts. That is what Mr. Chesterton does not do. He appeals to his view of the facts to support his view of the facts and, of course, his appeal is successful. Or he appeals to what he alleges to be the Rationalist's view of the facts to show that it is a particularly stupid and short-sighted view of them. And so it often is. Only it isn't the

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Rationalist's. The one thing that Mr. Chesterton never does in this book is to deal with facts as distinct from his own or some one else's impressions of them. It does not help me to be told that Mr. Smith thinks the Marble Arch beautiful, and that Mr. Jones thinks it ugly, if I am trying to find out what was the origin of the thing, who erected it, and why, and when. Similarly it does not help me to be told that it is an anti-Christian argument that man is "a mere variety of the animal kingdom" if I am out to discover what are the evidences that he is possessed of an immortal soul?

In all his treatment of facts Mr. Chesterton never lets them speak for themselves. "The ordinary agnostic," he says, "has got his facts all wrong." He gives us a bunch of these facts that are "all wrong." Here they are: "He"—the ordinary agnostic—"doubts because the Middle Ages were barbaric, but they weren't; because Darwinism is demonstrated, but it isn't; because miracles do not happen, but they do; because monks were lazy, but they were very industrious; because nuns are un-

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happy, but they are particularly cheerful; because Christian art was sad and pale, but it was picked out in peculiarly bright colours and gay with gold; because modern science is moving away from the supernatural, but it isn't, it is moving towards the supernatural with the rapidity of a railway train."

Without admitting for a moment that any man ever became an agnostic for such a reason as that he thought nuns are unhappy, without admitting that any of these reasons are good, bad, or indifferent, let us look at the treatment of facts in this passage. One example may suffice. Mr. Chesterton says the Middle Ages were not barbaric. The moment a man begins to look into the matter he is faced with this fact, that the Middle Ages were much worse than the Catholic believes them to have been, much better than the neo-Protestant will allow them to have been, and, in their evil features, exactly what the Rationalist has always held them to be, i.e. an exhibition of Christianity at the zenith of its power over the human mind. And to deny the darkness of the Dark Ages by the simple assertion that

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they were not dark is not argument, it is dogmatic impudence. Did Lecky think the Middle Ages were not dark and backward because he admitted that, on its ethical side, some of the teaching of the Church made for light in the darkness? Does Mr. Hyndman think the Middle Ages were not dark and backward because he recognizes that on its economic side Catholicism was much superior to the Protestantism that began by the profession of a desire to purify the monasteries, and ended with the wholesale plunder of the poor?

I don't know what Mr. Chesterton calls evidence. But if every historian who had no special religious axe to grind can be believed, if the papers, the State Papers and the private correspondence and diaries of the period can be believed, in a word, if there is any credence to be attached to contemporary testimony, the Middle Ages were the dark Ages. And with due respect to Mr. Chesterton's weight as a controversialist I venture to tell him that his reply to all this—"they wern't"—is not in the least effective. We should like to believe him, but history will not allow us to do so.

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If you examine all the other reasons that are given why agnostics do not believe, you will not find a single one of them to which the objection noted above does not apply. The objection, that is to say, that we have only Mr. Chesterton's definition of the agnostic's position, and only Mr. Chesterton's word that it is wrong.

The time has come to make an end of these very discursive observations on the orthodoxy expounded by Mr. Chesterton. I will therefore now endeavour by way of conclusion to set out what appears to me to be the defects of the book *Orthodoxy* as an apologetic for Christianity.

As an apologetic for Christianity *Orthodoxy* is at once the very best and the very worst that has been written in recent times. It is the very best, because there is in the vigour and valour of the style of it, and in the wit and whimsicality of the phrasing of it, and in the candour and confidence of it, something which is lacking from all the merely theological apologetics I ever read, namely, the sense that here is an honest man *searching* and not merely



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a professional expositor describing the goal of the search. From first to last in these pages we never lose touch with a provokingly human personality. And so the very manner in which the book is written sets up an unconscious bias in the author's favour, and, I make no doubt, makes him a great asset to the clergy who, poor gentlemen, do not put anything like such cheerful faith in the stability of their profession as he does. This book is the best thing that has happened during the religious conflicts of our times, because it gives the young Christian and the young sceptic the impression that they are having a glorious, clean, stand-up fight. And so it leaves a very deep sense of the manliness and the sincerity of the Christian in the mind of the young sceptic. This is what the bulk of the Christian apologists have never done. They have never fought fair. There is a dispute about a thing. "Very well," says Mr. Chesterton, "we'll have a drink together, and I'll fight you for it." And he fights like a man. The average Christian apologist never fought, or, if he could not save his face without making an appearance of fighting, he

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secreted a knife in his glove, and bolted in the excitement caused by the unexpected fall of his opponent.

In its lusty manliness Mr. Chesterton's book may be called the best apologetic for Christianity that has been written in recent times.

But it is also the worst apologetic because its defects, if they are more lovable defects than those of, say, the Rev. Dr. Torrey, are also more obvious and more fundamental. In a row of second-rate dowdy houses you probably would not notice if one of them had a broken window upstairs. You would have no reason for looking at their windows. But you could not help noticing a broken window at Peter Robinson's or the Stores. What Mr. Chesterton says to the Rationalist is something like this: "Come and have a look at these windows of mine. See how I have managed to get into them the antique and the novel, the grave and the gay; see how I have contrived to suggest at once a battle-field and a banquet, a campaign and a cottage; remark how I have put in laughter, but not the laughter of

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lunacy ; and tears, but not the tears of despair ; observe, in a word, that these windows of mine show forth in all its happily conflicting aspects the mystery of my religion. And, mark you this, that mystery is inviolate and eternal. For this glass of the windows in which it is all displayed is the most ancient glass in the world. It is called Faith, and it can never be broken.” And the Rationalist, not without a little regret at disturbing the equanimity of so amiable a gentleman, ventures to draw his attention to the fact that, incredible as it may seem, some one *has* thrown half a brick through one of the windows, shattering the glass that could never be broken, and disturbing the goods that could never be moved.

I have said that the defects of this apologetic are not only obvious—like a broken window at Peter Robinson’s—but fundamental.

The fundamental error of Mr. Chesterton is that he never goes down to fundamentals. He is, in a manner that is rather difficult to put into words, deeply superficial. He deals with fundamentals as if they were superficial, and with superficialities as if they were funda-

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mental. He takes a sledge-hammer to kill a flea, and a little box of insect powder to arrest a plague. He talks too much to be convincing. He never leaves us with a period for reflection between his talks. He is a hustler, hurrying, coaxing, chaffing, cheering, driving, dragging us on, until he lands us breathless in the church porch. And the moment we have got our wind we clear out of the porch again, and we say to Mr. Chesterton something like this : " What's the hurry ? You have brought us a very long way, and over a lot of strange territory, and we have not had a wash all the way. And now, when we are tired and dusty and rather bewildered by all these things you have been saying to us as you brought us along, you want us to go into that church and say it is the very place that we have been looking for all our lives. We shall do nothing of the kind. We shall go back at our leisure over this road along which you have driven us in your haste ; we shall examine carefully the turnings and the cross roads ; and if we find that by keeping our feet steadily in one direction we come to the end again by this church we will go inside. Our

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present notion is that in the commotion of your company we have, unwittingly on our part, taken more than one wrong turning."

This is, of course, nothing more than the impression this book leaves with me personally. I argued myself into Christianity. But I thought myself out of it. The thing that Mr. Chesterton's book lacks, the fundamental lack it seems to me is this, that he does not appear to have heard of the words of a certain writer who said: "In quietness and confidence shall be their strength."

Every one who has thought seriously for himself knows the value of silence. It has been said of human love :

" Ah, not alone is eloquence of speech  
The vehicle of passion and of troth,  
In an enchanted silence Love may reach  
The height of the irrevocable oath."

And I believe if anyone will read Mr. Chesterton's book, not in the rush of wild and whirling argument which seems to be his native air, but quietly, thinking out all these dazzling sentences and tracking to their inmost cells all these

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astounding suggestions, he will see less reason for being a Christian than ever.

Mr. Chesterton shows us orthodoxy as a citadel erected upon a catch-phrase, a tribunal based upon a trick. The catch-phrase turns out to be a lie, and the citadel has fallen to the ground. The trick is exposed and the tribunal is no more, and the judge who sat in it is buried in the wreckage.

With heads erect, a swinging step, and a new and nobler awe in our hearts we turn from the complicated ruin of orthodoxy out on to the broad road of humanity. The air is strangely clear and crisp and invigorating; it is the air of freedom.

THE END







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